CITY OF WHITEHORSE

WHITEHORSE MUNICIPAL EARLY YEARS PLAN 2014-2018

WHITEHORSE, A CITY FOR ALL CHILDREN

Supporting children aged 0-12 years and their families to achieve the best start to life

Acknowledgement of country

In the spirit of reconciliation, Whitehorse City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners of the land now known as Whitehorse and pays respect to its elders past and present.

Acknowledgement of contribution

The Whitehorse City Council acknowledges the extensive input and contribution to the development of this plan by a wide range of individuals and organisations.

In particular, Council acknowledges the value contribution to the plan made by community representatives, staff, councillors and key stakeholders through the consultation process.

The plan has been developed under the guidance and direction of the Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan Steering Committee.

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MAYOR'S MESSAGE

It gives me great pleasure to present the third iteration of the Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan titled *Whitehorse – A City for all Children.*

The youngest members of our community represent our future. They are tomorrow's leaders, teachers, engineers, doctors, nurses, entrepreneurs, emergency services officers, volunteers, artists and so forth!

As a community, we understand that given the best foundations in life....nurturing, care, love, quality education, and other supports... a child will grow to reach his or her full potential in life. However, families live in a complex and exciting world. A world that has its challenges and one that can at times create difficulties for some families to provide the best support for their children.

Our objective as a Council in developing the Municipal Early Years Plan has been to work with families, to work with the community, to work with our partner agencies and to work with the state and federal government to enhance and improve supports for all our families with young children. In this way we can best assist children to reach their full potential.

The development of this plan has involved a tremendous amount of effort and I together with my fellow Councillors extend our appreciation to the contribution and commitment of all members of the Municipal Early Years Steering Committee. The committee was chaired by Cr Denise Massoud and ably support by Cr Robert Chong, Council officers from Council's Health & Family Services and Community Development Departments, representatives from United Care Connections, Whitehorse Community Health Service and 2 community representatives.

It is with pleasure that on behalf of Council I present this plan to the Whitehorse community. Whitehorse is truly a City for all children.

Cr Sharon Ellis
MAYOR

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Whitehorse City Council is committed to supporting all children aged 0-12 years and their families to achieve the best start to life and to access all opportunities to grow, learn, develop and thrive over the course of childhood.

Council recognises the importance of childhood and how much it matters for the individual, the family and the wider community, now and into the future.

Extensive research into child and family development continues to confirm that the early years of a child's life and family formation are crucial in laying the foundations that contribute to a child's future development, health and wellbeing.

In developing the new Municipal Early Years Plan, Council engaged the community and key stakeholders widely using a range of innovative techniques. Most significantly, the development of the plan involved engaging a large number of pre-school and school aged children through family day care, long day care and primary schools. Feedback captured through the engagement process has directly informed the new plan, together with an analysis of government policy, local demographic information and existing services available for children and families in Whitehorse.

The Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan, *Whitehorse: A City for all Children*, provides a clear direction for Council and its partners to continue working together to improve outcomes for children from birth to the age of 12 and their families. It identifies how we, collectively as a community, can support families to provide the best possible environment in which to care for children and meet their developmental needs, health and wellbeing.

The plan identifies a strong vision for children and their families and a set of core principles that underpin the vision.

The name of the plan, *Whitehorse: A City for all Children*, was born out of one of the key themes identified by children through the development of the plan – the importance of a community in which all children are safe, welcome and included, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, language, gender, ability or socio economic status. A city for all children incorporates:

- Healthy, active and thriving children
- Secure, supported and engaged families
- Quality services for all children & families
- Safe, welcoming and inclusive community for all children & families

These four key elements have been adopted as the pillars, or key directions, of Council's Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-2018 and are supported by 23 targeted objectives and 70 strategic actions. These strategies are intrinsically linked to higher level strategies contained within the *Whitehorse Council Plan 2014-18)* and the Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan – *Health & Wellbeing in Whitehorse 2013-17.*

The strategies and actions contained within the plan will be developed into a comprehensive four year implementation plan containing specific actions, responsibilities, resources and time frames. In turn, annual operational plans will be prepared by Council staff working in partnership with key service delivery partners.

The implementation of the plan will be monitored by the Municipal Early Years Evaluation Committee on a six monthly basis. The committee will present a report on its findings to the Council at least annually.

Finally, the Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan has been prepared in conjunction with the Whitehorse Youth Plan to provide a seamless strategy covering children and young people from birth to the age of 25.

Council is committed to ensuring that Whitehorse is a *City for all children.*

OUR VISION FOR WHITEHORSE

COUNCIL VISION

The *Whitehorse Council Vision 2013-2023* outlines the long term aspirations of Councillors, community and staff of the City of Whitehorse. The outcomes of extensive consultation undertaken in 2012-13 are articulated in the following statement:

> *We aspire to be a healthy, vibrant, prosperous and sustainable community supported by strong leadership and community partnerships*

The City of Whitehorse will be:

- One of the most livable and sustainable municipalities in Melbourne
- Recognised for the quality of its open space and natural environment
- A community rich in culture and diversity that is inclusive, healthy and vibrant
- A well governed city that has a healthy and strong relationship with the community
- A prosperous and well supported local economy

MISSION

Whitehorse City Council, working in partnership with community to develop and grow our municipality through good governance, proactive strategic planning and advocacy, efficient, responsive services and quality infrastructure.

VALUES

In pursuing its goals, Whitehorse City Council is committed to the following values

- Consultation and Communication
- Democracy and Leadership
- Equity and Social Justice
- Integrity
- Openness and Accountability
- Sustainability
- Wellbeing

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

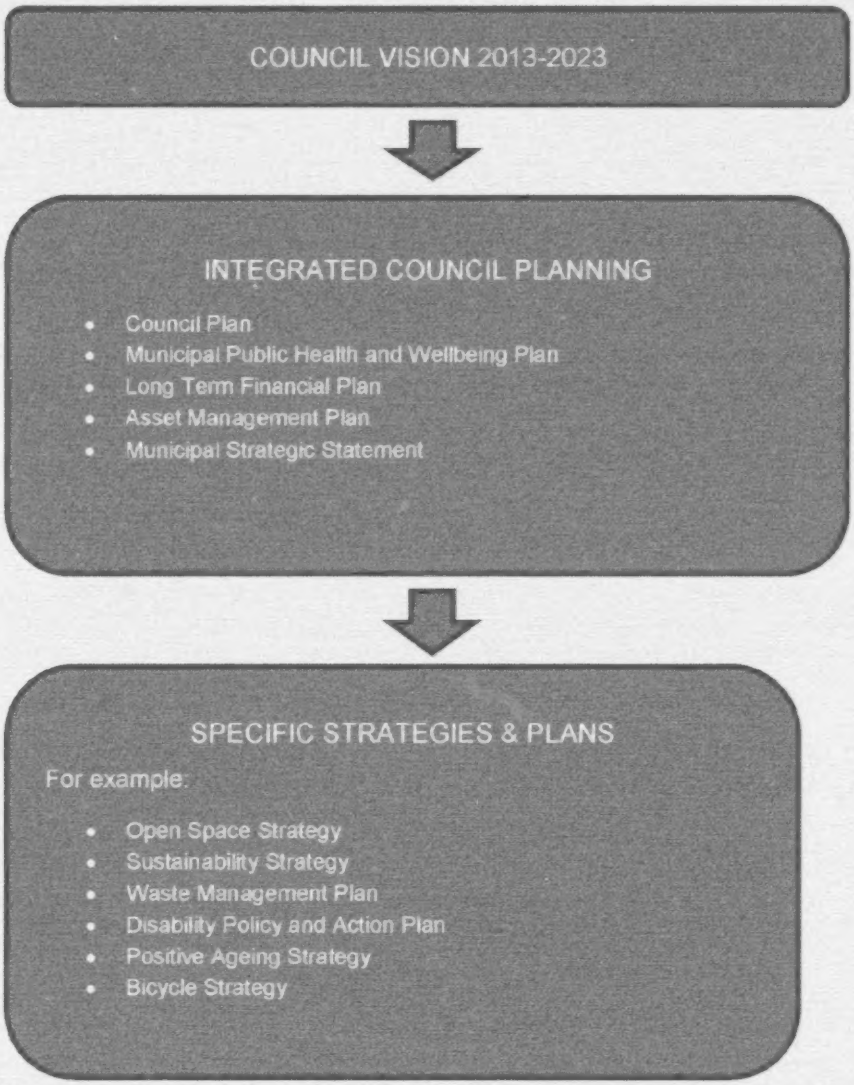
The aspirations outlined in the *Whitehorse Council Vision 2013-2023* are further underpinned in the following key strategic directions Whitehorse City Council commits to:

- Support a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and diverse community
- Maintain and enhance our built environment to ensure a liveable and sustainable city
- Protect and enhance our open space and natural environments
- Strategic leadership, partnership and open and accessible government
- Support a healthy local economy

These five strategic directions form the basis of Whitehorse's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, *Health and Wellbeing in Whitehorse 2013-2017.*

COUNCIL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The Council Planning framework details the relationships between various Council plans and strategies. As depicted in the diagram, Whitehorse Council have a strong commitment to health and wellbeing, with the Whitehorse Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan sitting alongside council's other high level strategic documents.



OUR VISION FOR CHILDREN

The Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-2018, *Whitehorse: A City for all Children*, has a clear vision for children aged 0-12 years in the City of Whitehorse.

All children in the City of Whitehorse
have the opportunity to achieve the best start to life:
to grow, learn, develop and thrive
from birth through to older childhood,
regardless of ethnic origin, religion, language,
gender, ability or socio economic status.

Whitehorse is a City for all Children.

PRINCIPLES TO SUPPORT THE VISION

The following principles underpin Council's vision for children in Whitehorse:

- Children, childhood and families are valued and respected.
- All children are valued as equal citizens in the City of Whitehorse and have the opportunity to access and participate in the life of the community.
- All children have the right to feel safe: at home, in care, education and service settings and throughout the wider community.
- Children have the opportunity to be children: to play, to laugh, to experience, to adventure, to rest, to make friends and to do activities every day that help them grow, learn and develop.
- Children are actively engaged, asked about their community and have their opinions and contributions valued and respected.
- Children and their families have the right to access services, supports and assistance they require to thrive and get the best start in life.
- Children and their families have the opportunity, support and encouragement to live healthy and active lifestyles, with access to parks, playgrounds, open spaces and recreational facilities.
- All children and families have the opportunity to be socially included and involved in community life.
- Families are supported to provide the best environment, love, care and parenting for their children.
- While all children and families are supported universally, the Whitehorse community recognises and pays particular attention to the needs of vulnerable children and families[1].
- The Whitehorse City Council has a diverse role in supporting children and families and is committed to achieving the best outcomes possible within its jurisdiction, influence, resources and capacity.

The Whitehorse City Council is committed to the principles of a Child Friendly City, as identified by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).[2] Council acknowledges that these principles involve a continuous process of innovation, monitoring and improvement.

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[1] Children and young people are vulnerable if the capacity of their parents and family to effectively care, protect and provide for their long term development and wellbeing is limited.

[2] See Appendix a for details about the UNICEF Child Protection model

OUR EARLY YEARS PLANNING JOURNEY

Previous early years plans

The Whitehorse City Council commenced the process of formal planning for improving children and family outcomes in 2004, with the development of its first *Municipal Early Years Plan (MEYP) - Building Better Beginnings* 2005-2007.

The preparation of an early years plan at this time was required by the Victorian Government as part of its Maternal & Child Health funding agreements, though adopted a broad community and family service focus.

The first iteration of the early years plan aimed to set the strategic direction and activity of Council and its community in supporting families with children aged 0 to 8 years.

In 2009, the Whitehorse City Council continued its early years planning journey, with the development of the *Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan – "Childhood Matters"* 2009-2013. The second iteration of an early years plan adopted a focus on enhancing and developing services and supports for families with young children aged 0-12 years.

Both iterations of the previous early years plans provided a roadmap for all stakeholders in the City of Whitehorse to move ahead in improving supports for children and their families. The development of both plans involved an extensive strategic planning process, drawing on both research and consultation with the community, councillors, government representatives and other key stakeholders.

The 2009 plan referenced the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities principles of valuing, respecting, listening to and supporting children. While the plan did not recommend that Council seek to become a signatory to the UNICEF program, it provided a number of practical and aspirational goals and actions aimed at strengthening support for these principles.

Taking us forward – a new plan

Having completed the implementation of the 2009 plan, the Whitehorse City Council has developed this new Municipal Early Years Plan.

The *Whitehorse: A City for all Children* Municipal Early Years Plan provides a clear road map for improving outcomes for children aged 0-12 years and their families in the City of Whitehorse over the four-year period 2014-2018.

It provides a whole of municipality strategic vision for children in the City of Whitehorse and establishes a set of priority directions for improving outcomes for children and families.

The plan is based on a philosophy and commitment to partnership between Council, other service providers, families and children.

The new plan builds on the success of the 2009 plan and draws on the extensive input of the Whitehorse community, Councillors, Council staff and key stakeholders in the region.

Development process

The development of the new Municipal Early Years Plan involved an extensive process that included:

- Background research into current knowledge and best practice in relation to early childhood development and children and family wellbeing.
- Assessment of government policy, funding and programs at federal, state and local levels.
- Analysis of demographic information relating to families and children in the City of Whitehorse.
- Profiling and mapping of universal, secondary and tertiary services available in the City of Whitehorse to support children and families.
- Consideration of outcomes and feedback from the community engagement process.

The Whitehorse City Council established the Municipal Early Years Plan Steering Committee to provide guidance and direction for the development of the new plan. The group was led by two elected Councillors and comprised staff from the Whitehorse City Council, Connections, Whitehorse Community Health Service and two community representatives.

Community consultation

A key step in the development of the new Municipal Early Years Plan has been the extensive community engagement process undertaken to capture community and stakeholder feedback in relation to improving outcomes for children and families in the City of Whitehorse.

Council designed and implemented a far reaching and innovative program of consultation activities aimed at engaging a wide range of interested stakeholders.

A major highlight of the engagement process was the consultation process undertaken with pre-school and school age children. Council engaged a renowned expert in children's consultation, Maureen Imeson, to help design an approach to engaging young children through a range of existing

trusted relationships and safe environments. Council was able to effectively engage a large number of young children through early childhood professionals in family day care, long day care and primary schools.

The overarching aims of the community engagement process included:

- To engage and obtain feedback from children aged 0 - 12 who live and attend school in the City of Whitehorse and their families.
- To engage and obtain feedback from a wide range of other stakeholders who have an interest in the wellbeing of children in the City of Whitehorse.
- To better understand the needs of children in the City of Whitehorse.
- To identify new and emerging issues facing children in the City of Whitehorse.
- To identify practical initiatives that can be implemented by the Whitehorse City Council over a period of four years to improve outcomes for children in the City of Whitehorse.
- To create an opportunity for everyone in the Whitehorse community to provide input to the development of the next Early Years Plan.
- To ensure that the Early Years Plan subsequently developed is robust and reflects input from the Whitehorse community and key stakeholders.

The consultation process sought to engage children aged 3-12 years, parents and caregivers of children aged 0-12 years, the wider City of Whitehorse community, community groups and organisations, Councillors, Council staff and senior management, family and children's service providers and key State Government departments and agencies.

Consultation activities undertaken included:

Your Say Whitehorse	Introductory community survey
Survey Monkey	Detailed community and key stakeholder survey
Spring Festival	Families survey and opportunity for children's drawings
Councillor workshop	Workshop with City of Whitehorse Councillors
Management team workshop	Workshop with City of Whitehorse senior management
Early childhood services staff workshop	Workshop with City of Whitehorse staff involved in the planning, delivery and coordination of early childhood and family support services
Joint staff workshop	Workshop with City of Whitehorse staff from all departments
Children services consultations	Consultation with pre-school age children in Council run long day care centres and Council coordinated family day care services.

School consultation #1	Consultation with primary school age children from St John's Primary School
School consultation #2	Consultation with primary school age children from Kerrimuir Primary School

Consultation activities were broadly publicised through the Whitehorse News and Leader Newspaper publications and via direct email to an extensive database of community groups, organisations and family and children's service providers.

A consistent set of discussion topics underpinned each of the different consultation activities, enabling consolidation of feedback and distillation of key themes. Key discussion topics and questions of adults engaged through the process included:

Positive attributes	What attributes currently make the City of Whitehorse a positive place for children aged 0-12 and their families?
Positive changes	What positive changes have you noticed in the City of Whitehorse in the last few years that support better outcomes for children aged 0-12 and their families?
Trends	What trends have you observed with children aged 0-12 and their families in the City of Whitehorse over recent years?
Issues & challenges	What do you see as the key issues and challenges facing children aged 0-12 years and their families in the City of Whitehorse?
Service gaps	What gaps or deficiencies are you aware of in the services and supports available for children aged 0-12 and their families in the City of Whitehorse?
Ideas & priorities	What opportunities do you see to build on existing strengths in Whitehorse and improve the lives and wellbeing of children aged 0-12 and their families in the City of Whitehorse?
Partnerships	What opportunities exist for partnership-based initiatives between Council and other service providers to improve outcomes for children and their families in the City of Whitehorse over coming years?

Key questions asked of children through the various consultation activities included:

Positives	What are the things you like about where you live?
Negatives	What are the things you don't like about where you live?
Places	What places do you like to visit with your family?
Improvements	What would make where you live a better place for children?

IMPORTANCE OF THE EARLY YEARS: THE EVIDENCE

The early years in a child's life are the most critical in influencing their long-term health and wellbeing. The right start in life sets children on the path to success. [3]

Getting a great start in life makes the world of difference to a person's ability to thrive at school, stay healthy and socially connected, and contribute to society throughout life. There is also significant evidence to demonstrate that lost opportunities in this period are particularly difficult to recover later in life.

The early years, pregnancy to eight years, are a period of rapid cognitive, biological and social development. Our knowledge and understanding of just how important these years are in a child's life is constantly being extended as new information becomes available.

The environment in which a child spends these early years strongly shapes whether or not they have strong foundations for their future health, wellbeing and development. Some of the most critical elements in early childhood to support growth, development and long-term health and wellbeing include:

Brain & skills development

A child's brain development commences during pregnancy, accelerates rapidly from birth and continues through to adulthood. Experiences in early childhood create the foundation for learning, behaviour, physical and mental health. Healthy brain development is important not just for cognitive skills and future academic achievement but also for physical, social and emotional development.

During the first 24 months of life, children's acquisition of language is highly associated with their mothers' speech and interaction with them. By two years of age, children whose mothers speak to them the most have vocabularies up to eight times greater than those whose mothers speak to them the least.

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[3] Information presented in this section is derived primarily from the *National Early Childhood Development Strategy, Investing in the Early Years*, Coalition of Australian Governments (2009) and the Victorian Government's *Early Years Strategic Plan – Improving outcomes for all Victorian children 2014-2020.*

Basic skills acquired in the first years of life, such as rapid language growth and the ability to regulate emotions, are crucial to developing more advanced skills and achieving success in education and later life.

Factors affecting childhood development

Early childhood experiences have a significant impact on a child's development and are difficult to modify later in life.

A mother's health and nutrition during pregnancy has significant impacts on early childhood growth and development and shape the child's future opportunities. Poor nutrition and exposure to stress or toxins during pregnancy and the first years of life can adversely effect a child's development.

Low birth weight is linked to the development of later childhood cognitive and behavioural disorders as well as chronic diseases later in life such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes and mental health problems. Low birth weight is known to be related to a range of preventable risk factors during pregnancy, such as low maternal age (less than 17 years), maternal malnutrition, tobacco, alcohol and other drug use during pregnancy, genito-urinary tract infections including sexually transmitted diseases, and poor antenatal health care utilisation.

Disabilities present at birth or acquired in the early years of life can have a significant impact on a child's development and experiences in life. Early intervention through targeted programs and services improves outcomes for the child and their families.

Poor nutrition in young children, such as excess consumption of sugars, fats and oils, is linked to increased childhood obesity and emotional and behavioural problems.

Secure relationships and attachment

Development of relationships with important people in a child's life is critical to long-term wellbeing. One of the most critical factors shaping children's development is the quality of their relationship with a parent or close carer and the ability of that carer to understand and nurture their development.

Providing babies and young children with stable, caring, loving and stimulating environments with lots of opportunities to interact with others offers the greatest opportunity to thrive from birth through to later childhood and beyond.

Parenting attributes such as consistency, warmth and community connectedness are associated with positive outcomes for children. Secure attachment occurs when the carer responds in a predictable, warm and appropriate way.

Parental confidence and skills are key factors in accounting for the overall proportion of children who are developmentally at risk.

Stress in early childhood

Ongoing stress and highly stressful events during early childhood can adversely influence the nervous system's response to stress for the rest of a child's life, with consequences for ongoing learning, behaviour, and physical and mental health.

Children with more secure attachment relationships in infancy are likely to experience lower levels of stress, greater behavioural control and demonstrate less aggressive behavior. Exposure to abuse and neglect and other traumatic experiences are associated with negative outcomes for children across all income levels. Children exposed to abuse can experience significant adverse consequences for ongoing physical and mental health.

Disadvantage

Early childhood development is affected by the interplay of a number of multiple risk and protective factors in the child's environment. Parents' age, educational level, employment status and family income have all been shown to be associated with children's developmental outcomes.

The impact of socioeconomic and broader disadvantage differences become significant by the age of two to three years. Many people with a poor start to life never catch up and disadvantage passes from one generation to the next. Lost opportunities to build strong foundations for lifelong health and learning in the early years are particularly difficult to recover later in life.

Poverty is more complex than insufficient income, and includes such things as social status, exclusion and lower self-esteem. The effects of poverty on children and their development include a number of often interconnected factors including stress, poorer health outcomes, limited exposure to early learning opportunities and poorer parenting.

Children living in poverty have a much higher probability of being exposed to multiple risk factors. Children in low-income families are more likely to have poor developmental outcomes, make a difficult transition to school, and have reduced aspirations and to pass this risk on to their children in a cycle of intergenerational disadvantage
Key protective factors that can reduce the impact of risk factors on young children include the presence of an involved significant adult other than a parent in the child's life, professional support to improve mother–child interactions and positive community environments.

Parental employment can contribute to better health, educational and social outcomes for children. Stimulating employment is associated with positive mental health and wellbeing of parents who are

then able to parent more effectively and support better outcomes for children. Employment also provides greater financial security for families and children.

Paid parental leave has been shown to be one of the most effective ways of supporting parents achieve a positive work and family balance. Children under 12 months of age, in particular, have better outcomes when mothers are able to take leave, in part, because this supports longer duration of breastfeeding.

Early childhood education and care

Learning is fundamental to children's futures. Research has found that the mother's educational status and the quality of the early years home learning environment were the strongest predictors of good academic, social and behavioural outcomes for children.

Research has also shown that participation in high-quality early childhood education and care over multiple years is important for childhood learning, growth and development. The quality of early childhood education and care provided is critical to children's learning and development. High-quality early childhood programs benefit all children's learning and development, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Short and long term improvements in child development outcomes include improved cognitive and social development; reduced need for remedial education; higher rates of school completion and post-school education; higher employment rates; and reduced criminal activity and welfare dependence.

Universal services for all children, such as preschool, have also been shown to produce positive results for all children. Preschool contributes to better intellectual development, improved independence, concentration and sociability for all children, and school progress. Better outcomes were found when children attended preschool for longer and when staff had higher qualifications.

Early childhood education and care delivers significant benefits for all children and families, particularly children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Quality of childhood services

Research has identified the critical importance of quality in early childhood development programs for improving outcomes. Key aspects of quality linked to positive child outcomes include higher qualifications of the early childhood professionals, lower child-to-staff ratios and a strong relationship between the child and a stable caregiver.

Young children who spend excessive hours in poor-quality child care characterised by low staff qualifications and higher ratios and excessive staff turnover are more likely to have higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol and to develop social, emotional and behavioural problems.

The importance of quality extends to the quality of the primary school a child attends and the effectiveness of school-based programs for sustaining good outcomes.

Early intervention

Targeted early childhood development programs, particularly those that work directly with both children and parents, have been shown to deliver benefits to both children and society. Positive parenting programs have shown to deliver improved child and family outcomes, including reduced rates of emotional and behavioural problems in children; reduced rates of child abuse and neglect; increased parenting skills and confidence; and reduced parent depression, stress and coercive parenting.

Early maternal and child health assessment and extended support by skilled health professionals for disadvantaged children and parents have shown to deliver benefits including improved health behaviours during pregnancy, greater social support, increased birth weight and reduced risk of premature birth.

Cost effectiveness and economic value of intervention

Investment in early childhood programs can be highly effective, repaying their costs, generating savings and producing returns to society. Long term benefits of investing in improved early years outcomes include increased educational achievement, labour force participation and reduced need for spending on child welfare, health services, social welfare, remedial education programs and the criminal justice system.

Economic benefits of successful programs can be substantial, especially where they improve school retention and attainment. There is substantial evidence to show that investing in early childhood in a way that improves educational outcomes not only helps each individual; but is a vital driver of economic growth, productivity and social progress.

Service integration

There is evidence that well-funded, high quality and integrated services lead to increased service use and improved outcomes for both families and children. Increased service use by families led to more maternal employment, less family poverty, improved parenting skills and greater family and community cohesion.

Universal service platforms (those services available to everyone) provide an entry point for families to access services and can provide an effective and nonstigmatised mechanism to identify and refer high risk families to more intensive support.
Effective outreach and engagement with the most marginalized families and efforts to make all services more accessible and inclusive are critical.

CITY OF WHITEHORSE: A GREAT PLACE FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

It is widely recognised that the City of Whitehorse is a fantastic place for children aged 0-12 and their families.

Members of the community and key stakeholders engaged in the development of the Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-2018 identified some of the key attributes that current make the City of Whitehorse such a positive place for children and families.

These included:

Services

- High quality children and family services
- Wide variety of services available to support children and families
- MCH service
- Family day care
- Kindergartens
- Quality childcare
- Immunisation
- Range of early intervention services
- School holiday programs
- Health and education services

Places and spaces

- Child and family friendly parks & gardens, including pocket parks
- Wide range of passive and active open spaces
- Playgrounds & public play spaces
- Walking and cycling paths
- Natural bushland environments
- Family oriented environment
- Blackburn Lake

Accessibility

- Good public transport to major centres
- Proximity to the city and other locations

Activities

- Access to affordable activities
- Playgroups
- Community festivals, events, markets and activities – in particular Spring Festival and Chinese New Year
- Variety of shopping locations
- Plenty of extra-curricular activities such as dance and music
- Sporting and recreation opportunities, facilities, ovals and clubs
- Arts and craft opportunities
- Restaurants
- Free family events
- Lots of things to do and plenty of fun

Facilities

- Aquatic centres
- Excellent health facilities
- High quality public and private schools available
- Local community centres
- Community arts centre
- Toy libraries
- Public libraries
- Language schools
- Lots of opportunities for the community to engage

Safe and supporting community

- Safe community and low crime rate
- Friendly people
- Diversity of the community
- Clean environment

COUNCIL'S ROLE IN SHAPING THE EARLY YEARS

Early childhood services aim to meet the care, health, educational and developmental needs of children. There are 3 broad categories of early childhood and family support services: universal, secondary and tertiary. The early years service system within the City of Whitehorse offers a range of services to children and families within these three categories, provided by a range of government and non-government providers.

Within this service system, Whitehorse City Council plays a critically important role in supporting positive outcomes for children and their families through a diverse range of functions, including:

Service provider

Council provides a wide range of services to support children and families. Many of these targeted specifically at children and families, while others are aimed at servicing the entire community:

- Maternal and child health
- Immunisation
- Long Day Care
- Family Day Care coordination
- Family support
- Toy library
- Playgroups
- Libraries

Advocate

Council regularly advocates on behalf of children and families, calling for increased funding and programs and changes to State and Federal Government policy to enhance early years outcomes.

Leader & planner

Council takes a leadership role in planning for improved early years.

Provider of facilities and infrastructure

Council provides an extensive range of facilities and infrastructure that support positive outcomes for children and their families, such as:

- Parks and gardens
- Playgrounds
- Open spaces
- Sporting ground and complexes
- Aquatic centres
- Libraries
- Kindergartens
- Roads
- Footpaths
- Walking tracks
- Cycling paths
- Neighbourhood houses
- Community centres
- Lake

Information provider

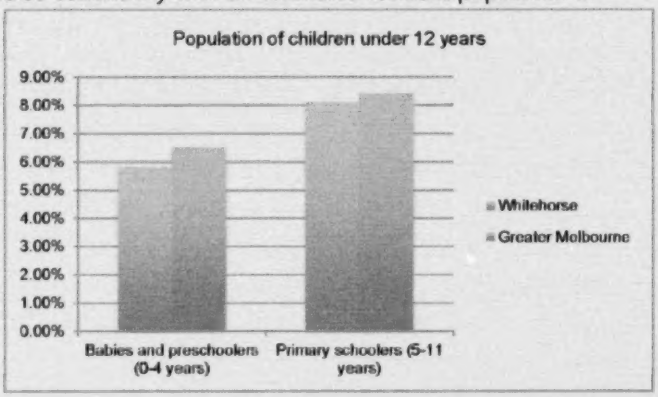
Council provides the community with information about available services, supports and assistance to children and families. It also promotes widely the many opportunities to be active and get involved in community life.

WHITEHORSE COMMUNITY IN CONTEXT

The City of Whitehorse is located 12 -22km east of Melbourne CBD. The major features of the city include the large technology precinct in the Tally Ho area, the Melbourne campus of Deakin University, Box Hill TAFE, Box Hill Hospital. The three major activity centres are Box Hill, Forest Hill Chase and the Nunawading mega mile. Whitehorse also has several smaller neighbourhood shopping centres scattered around the municipality.

Population

The City of Whitehorse comprises a diverse community with an estimated resident population of 158,992 (2012).



In 2011, the City of Whitehorse had 8,829 babies and pre-schoolers aged 0-4 years, which accounted for 5.8% of the total population. This compares to 6.5% across Greater Melbourne.

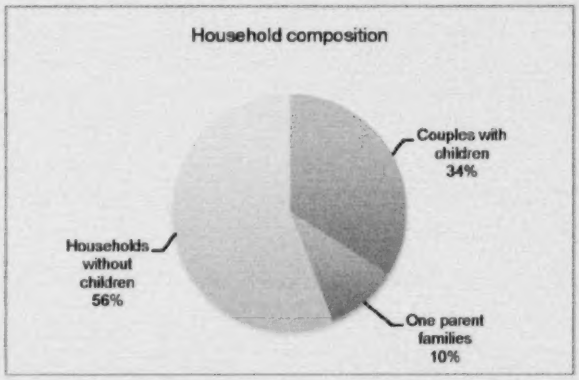
At the same time, the City of Whitehorse had 12,255 primary schoolers aged 5-11 years, making up 8.1% of the total population. This was also lower than the 8.4% of the Greater Melbourne population of this age.

While the City of Whitehorse has a lower proportion of children aged under 12 than the Victorian average, it has a higher proportion of people aged 60 years and over.

The overall population of the City of Whitehorse is forecast to grow by 22,956 people (14%) by 2031, with the majority of this growth set to occur in the older age groups rather than the younger groups.

Household & family composition

In 2011, households with children made up 43% of the population in Whitehorse, which is comparable to the average across Greater Melbourne.

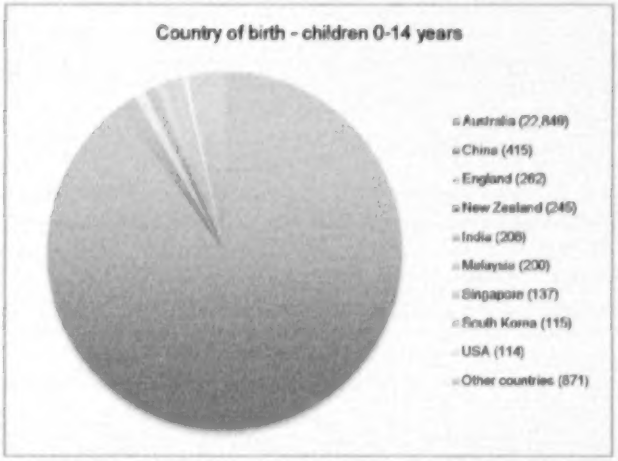


Making up the 43% of households with children are 34% being couples with children and 10% being one-parent families. The majority of couples with children households are couples with young children aged less than 15 years. Single parents are more likely to have older children aged over 15 years.

Most children aged 0-12 years are located in the suburbs of Mitcham, Nunawading and Blackburn.

Place of birth

The vast majority (89.9% of 25,416) of children aged 0-14 living in the City of Whitehorse were born in Australia. Outside of Australia, the major countries of birth of children aged 0-14 years include China (415), England (262), New Zealand (245), India (208), Malaysia (200), Singapore (137), South Korea (115) and USA (114).



Across the entire Whitehorse population, 62.3% (94,359) of residents were born in Australia. Outside of Australia, the major countries of birth of residents of all ages include China (11,048), England (5,372), India (3,514), Malaysia (3,348), Vietnam (2,167), Hong Kong (2,040), Greece (1,916), New Zealand (1,909), Sri Lanka (1,790) and Italy (1,691).

In total, 33.4% of the Whitehorse population were born overseas, with 27.4% of the total population born in countries of non-English speaking backgrounds.

The indigenous population of 314 (0.22%) of the population. Of the indigenous population, 11% are aged 0-4 years, 17% are 5-14 years and 17% are aged 15-24 years.

Language spoken at home

30.3% of the Whitehorse population speak a non-English language at home.

Major languages include Mandarin, Cantonese, Greek, Italian and Vietnamese.

Of all Whitehorse residents, 66.0% speak only English at home and 30.3% speak a non-English language (either exclusively, or in addition to English). Major languages other than English spoken at home in Whitehorse include Mandarin (7.5% / 11,353), Cantonese (5.1% / 7,766), Greek (3.1% / 4,761), Italian (1.7% / 2,248) and Vietnamese (1.2% / 1,862).

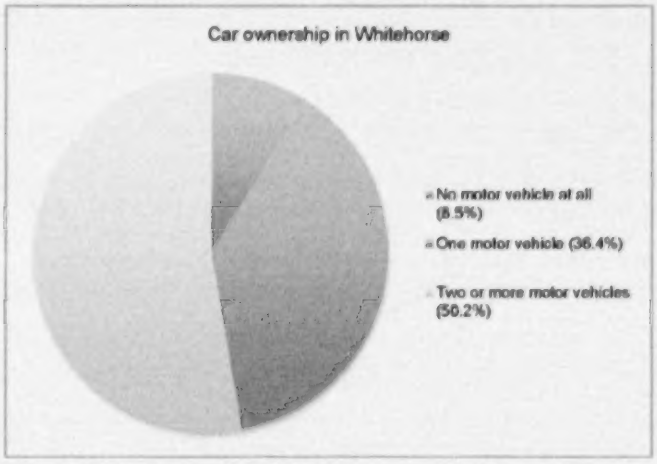
The number of people who spoke a language other than English at home increased by 9,324 or 25.6% between 2006 and 2011, while the number of people who spoke English only decreased by 3,013 or 2.9%.

5.5% of the Whitehorse population, or 8,301 people, have low proficiency in English

Car ownership

Car ownership levels by Whitehorse households can influence children and families' access to services and activities.

- 8.5% of households have no motor vehicles at all.
- 36.4% of households have 1 motor vehicle.
- 50.2% of households have 2 or more motor vehicles, this compares to 50.9% of households across Greater Melbourne.



Socio-economic disadvantage

Measuring socio-economic disadvantage of a population provides an insight to many factors that can influence a community's health and wellbeing. The SEIFA Index of Disadvantage measures the relative level of socio-economic disadvantage based on a range of attributes that reflect disadvantage such as low income, low educational attainment, high unemployment, and jobs in relatively unskilled occupations.

In 2011, the City of Whitehorse had a score of 1,051.2 on the SEIFA index of disadvantage.

This is the 11th highest SEIFA rating of local

A higher score on the index means a lower level of disadvantage. A lower score on the index means a higher level of disadvantage.

While the SEIFA Index rating indicates a relatively low level of disadvantage, many pockets of disadvantage exist within the City of Whitehorse.

Key indicators of childhood wellbeing

Indicator	Comparison with Victorian averages	Trends
Breastfeeding		
Breastfeeding rates are a key measure of long-term childhood health.	In 2011-12 the City of Whitehorse had higher levels of breastfeeding (fully or partial) than the Victorian average, at discharge, 2 weeks, 3 months and 6 months.	Breastfeeding rates (fully or partial) in the City of Whitehorse drop considerably over the first six months of a baby's life, which is consistent with the trend across Victoria. In recent years the City of Whitehorse has experienced increases in the rate of partial breastfeeding and decreases in the rate of full breastfeeding.
Maternal & child health (MCH) participation		
Measurements of participation rates in MCH Key Ages and Stages Consultations provides a valuable insight to early childhood and family health and wellbeing.	In 2011-12 the City of Whitehorse had higher levels of MCH participation than the Victorian average across all Key Ages & Stages consultations	Over recent years, MCH participation rates in the City of Whitehorse have increased or remained static for Ages & Stages up to 8 months, though consistently declined for Ages and Stages visits at 12 months, 18 months, 2 years and 3.5 years.
Immunisation		
Measures of the proportion of children who are fully immunised provides an insight to the early childhood and community health.	In 2012-13 the City of Whitehorse had slightly higher immunisation rates for children at age 12-15 months compared to the Victorian average and comparable levels for children aged 24-27 months and 60-63 months	Immunisation levels among children in Whitehorse have continued to increase over recent years.
Kindergarten participation		
Measures of the proportion of children who attend four year old kindergarten provide a valuable insight to a child's readiness for attending school and capacity to transition into school successfully.	In 2012, the City of Whitehorse had slightly lower kindergarten participation rates at 97.0% than the Victorian average of 98%.	Kindergarten participation levels in the City of Whitehorse have increased from 92.7% in 2008 to 97.0% in 2012.

Literacy & numeracy		
Measures of the proportion of children who achieve national minimal standards in numeracy and literacy provide an insight to the education levels of children in a given population.	In 2011, both literacy and numeracy levels of Year 3 children in the City of Whitehorse were slightly lower than the Victorian average.	Between 2008 and 2010, literacy and numeracy levels of Year 3 children in the City of Whitehorse were slightly higher than the Victorian average, reflecting a recent change.
Child abuse		
Two key measures provide an insight to the level of child abuse, being the rates of substantiated child abuse and the rate of children on child protection orders.	In 2010-11, the rate of child abuse substantiations in the City of Whitehorse was 3.6 per 1,000 aged 0-17 years, compared to 6.7 per 1,000 in Victoria.	Levels of child abuse in the City of Whitehorse are consistently lower than Victorian averages.
	In 2010, the children on child protection orders in the City of Whitehorse was 3.2 per 1,000 children aged 0-17 years, compared to 5.4 per 1,000 in Victoria.	

POLICY CONTEXT

The development of the Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan 2014 2018 is undertaken within the context of a wide range of government policy directions at the local, state and federal levels.

Policy and practice developments in the early years are considerable with the early childhood sector experiencing marked reform in recent years at both the national and state level. Key developments such as the national approach to quality and regulation of early childhood education and care through the National Quality Framework, and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, are designed to enhance all children's learning and development from birth to eight years of age.

Federal Government

Through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), all Australian Governments have committed to making early childhood an area for national reform. COAG's reform agenda includes action to:

- Address early childhood workforce issues.
- Establish a national Early Years Learning Framework.
- Create a national approach to quality and regulation of early childhood education and child care through the National Quality Framework (DEEWR, 2012) that took effect on 1 January 2012 with key requirements such as qualifications, educator-to-child ratios and other key staffing arrangements phased in between 2012 and 2020.
- Improve data and performance information in early childhood.
- Develop a national early childhood development strategy.

Key Federal policy frameworks for the early years include:

The National Early Childhood Development Strategy - Investing in the Early Years (COAG, 2009). In jointly developing the Strategy, the Australian, state and territory governments signalled their intention to take a leadership role in early childhood development now and into the future. It covers children from before birth to eight years and aims to improve the health, safety, early learning and wellbeing of all children and better support disadvantaged children to reduce inequalities.

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The National Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009). This framework underpins universal access to early childhood education, and will ensure the delivery of nationally consistent and quality early education.

Protecting Children is Everyone's Business National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009–2020 (FAHCSIA, 2009).

In April 2009 COAG endorsed the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. The Framework aims to achieve a substantial and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect in Australia over time. Under the Framework all families should have access to universal supports, such as education and health care. Those families requiring more assistance should be able to access more intensive prevention interventions. Tertiary interventions, such as Child Protection, are seen as a last resort.

My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care in Australia (DEEWR, 2011)

Another key component of the COAG's national reform agenda for childhood education and care. It has been incorporated in the National Quality Standard in order to ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality school age care across sectors and jurisdictions.

State Government

The Victorian Government demonstrates a strong commitment to the early years through the provision of a wide range of services that support children's learning and development.

Key State policy frameworks for the early years include:

The Early Years Strategic Plan – Improving outcomes for all Victorian children 2014-2020

The latest strategic plan was launched in March 2014 by the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. The Plan aims to improve outcomes and better support children in the period from pregnancy to eight years of age. It aims to strengthen the responsiveness of the early childhood sector and promote a seamless learning experience for children across early childhood and school to improve children's outcomes

The Plan has three key areas of focus:

- Supporting parents and communities to give children a great start
- Early and sustained support for those who need it most
- All children benefiting from high-quality early learning.

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework for all Children from Birth to Eight Years (DEECD 2009)

Aligned with the National Early Years Learning Framework, the 2009 Victorian framework was designed to advance all children's learning and development from birth to eight years of age. The framework provides early childhood professionals with a common language for describing outcomes for children and describes practice principles to guide early childhood professionals to work together, with children and with families to achieve the best outcomes for every child.

Balert Boorron: The Victorian Plan for Aboriginal Children and Young People (2010-2020) (DEECD, 2010)

This plan outlines the common aim of Victorian Aboriginal communities and the Victorian Government to ensure that Aboriginal children have the best start in life, are able to succeed in school, and grow into capable, active adults.

Improving Victoria's Early Childhood Workforce: Working to give Victoria's children the best start in life (DEECD, 2009a)

This strategic document responds to the need for an appropriately skilled workforce to meet growing demand and expectations around appropriately qualified early childhood workforce to support national and state reform programs and outlines associated government investment in this area.

Whitehorse City Council

Whitehorse City Council has a comprehensive suite of policies that respond to the diversity of community needs in the City of Whitehorse encompassing: leadership, planning, support, and advocacy; and the delivery of sustainable local services and facilities to support the health and wellbeing of children aged 0 to 12 years and their families living in the City of Whitehorse.

City of Whitehorse Council Vision 2013 – 2023

The Council Vision 2013-2023 commits Whitehorse City Council to a set of priorities for future action. These priorities have been translated into five Strategic Directions to reflect and respond to our community's aspirations, values and needs. The five Strategic Directions include:

1. Support a healthy, vibrant, inclusive and diverse community;
2. Maintain and enhance our built environment to ensure a liveable and sustainable city;
3. Protect and enhance our open space and natural environments;
4. Strategic leadership and open and accessible government; and
5. Support a healthy local economy.

City of Whitehorse Council Plan 2013 – 2017

The Council Plan identifies Council's strategic priorities and key actions for the next four years. This important document sets Council's direction for the future and details how Council will allocate its financial and non-financial resources to deliver the Council Plan and all Council services, for the next four years. The Council Plan is Council's response to the goals and aspirations as articulated in the 10-year plan; Council Vision 2013-2023.

The Council Plan comprises five Strategic Objectives and 43 strategies to be implemented over the next four years. The Strategic Objectives are:

1. Appropriate multipurpose programs, services, facilities and initiatives that promote and deliver wellbeing and inclusive connected communities
2. Maintain, develop and enhance our built environment
3. Increase in the amount of quality open space and improvement in the sustainability of our natural environment
4. Strong leadership and governance in partnership with the community and supported through regional collaboration and cooperation
5. A dynamic local economic environment that is regionally connected.

Other key Council strategic plans of relevance to the early years include:

- Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017
- Municipal Youth Plan 2009-2013
- Diversity Policy and Action Plan 2012-2016
- Disability Policy and Action Plan 2012-2016
- Reconciliation Action Plan 2011-2015
- Play Space Strategy 2011

SERVICE MAPPING

A key step in the development of the Municipal Early Years Plan has been the profiling and mapping of services available in the City of Whitehorse for children and families across three categories:

Universal services

Services that provide support to all who need it, without regard to their ability to pay. Universal services include Maternal and Child Health services, Child Care services, Kindergartens and school nursing.

Secondary services

For families/children with a special need or early stage risk factor. These services include early childhood intervention to support children with a disability or development delay, as well as support and parenting services for families with the aim of reducing the risk or managing the problem

Tertiary services

For people with needs that require intensive (and often ongoing) intervention. These services include child protection and placement services.

The early years service system in Whitehorse is complex, with a diversity of service providers, funding providers and service boundaries. The age range of people supported by early years services (0-12 years) presents an additional layer of complexity to the service system, given the vastly differing needs of newborn children and their parents to children approaching the transition to secondary school.

The service mapping exercise identified that the City of Whitehorse is very well serviced by child and family-focused services and supports. Being centrally located in the eastern metropolitan region results in many regionally-focused services being based in the City of Whitehorse.

Universal services a broadly dispersed throughout the municipality. Specialist education services are more available in the southern half of the municipality. Secondary services are largely concentrated in the Box Hill area although some are located in Mitcham, Vermont, Forest Hill and Burwood East.

While there is largely a service concentration in the Box Hill area, the area is centrally located and well connected via public transport including trains, trams and buses.

The following summarises the availability of children and family focuses services available in the City of Whitehorse:

Universal services

Maternal and Child Health	The municipality is well serviced by 22 MCH nurses, providing 13.3 EFT, delivered across six (6) high quality family centres. MCH services are provided free of charge and consists of 10 health surveillance visits occurring at key life stages. Additional visits to assist first time mothers and vulnerable children are also provided under the universal framework, as well as a flexible capacity to provide first time parent groups and other community building activities.
Immunisation	Free immunisation services for 0-5 year old children are provided by Council, local GPs and hospitals/medical centres in the municipality. The Whitehorse City Council provides ten infant immunisation sessions each month from four locations (Nunawading, Box Hill Nth, Box Hill Sth & Vermont Sth). Approximately 54% of all infant vaccinations (approximately 15,000/year) provided in the municipality are provided at these sessions. There are 200 GPs operating from 50 Medical centres that provide 45% of vaccinations.
Playgroups	There are 25 playgroups registered with Playgroup Association Victoria, which provide parents and caregivers with the opportunity to meet new people, gain support and exchange parenting ideas. In addition to the registered playgroups, it is expected that many more informal playgroups exists, which endure for a period of time, and then disappear as children become older, groups disband or amalgamate and family needs change.
Toy library groups	Four (4) toy library groups exist, which provide parents and caregivers with the opportunity to meet new people, gain support, exchange parenting ideas and provide a cost effective way for parents to access a wide range of toys for their children.
Child care	The city is well serviced by a mix of formal child care - regulated care that takes place away from the child's home, including long day care, occasional care, before and/or after school care and family day care. In total, there are currently 32 community and privately managed long day care services including five Council Centres operating in Whitehorse, in total offering a total of 2,021 places across Whitehorse. In terms of family day care, there are 39 independent educators (contractors) registered with the Whitehorse Family Day Care Service who provide a quality option to centre based care for working and studying families through combining the benefits of other childcare services within a home environment.

In addition to formal child care, 27.3% of the Whitehorse population reported in the 2011 Census that they provided unpaid child care, which is similar to the average rate in Melbourne (27.0%).

It is estimated that there are currently 2,141 equivalent full time accredited (LDC & FDC) places in the municipality servicing 10,567 children aged between 0 – 5 years. The total number of children serviced by long day care and family day care in the City of Whitehorse exceeds the population of children aged 0-5 years, highlighting that the services cater for a wide r population.

The Blackburn Sth, Burwood East & Forest Hill areas have the highest ratio of 0 – 5 yo children to family day care and long day care places in the municipality. Conversely, Blackburn Sth, Burwood East and Forest Hill localities have considerably less compared to the other five localities.

Before and after school care	Before school care is offered in 29 schools and after school care is offered in 33 schools.
Vacation care	Vacation care is offered in 10 schools.
Occasional care	There are currently nine (9) occasional care centres operating within the City of Whitehorse, providing care for short periods of time on a permanent or casual basis. It enables children to play and interact with other children, while parents are provided with child-free time. Utilisation data collected from occasional care services in Whitehorse in 2014 shows that there is currently a total of approximately 150 occasional childcare places provided across the municipality.
Kindergarten services	The City of Whitehorse is well serviced by kindergartens, providing programs for 3 and 4 year old children. In Whitehorse, kindergarten is provided through a range of management options inclusive of 30 community-managed stand-alone kindergartens, 7 independent schools, 6 community/council managed long day care centres and 10 privately managed long day care centres. Four year old kindergarten In 2014, a total of 1,824 places were provided for 4 year old kindergarten, with actual physical capacity slightly higher at more than 2,200 places. When compared to the overall population of 4-year-old children in Whitehorse of 1,850, the municipality is well serviced by funded kindergarten programs for children in the year before commencing school. The cost for 4yo kindergarten varies significantly in Whitehorse. In 2014, the lowest fee is $265 per term and the highest is $480 per term respectively.

	In terms of service provision across the various providers, community-managed stand alone kindergartens make up 80% of the overall service provision, long day care 11% and independent schools 9%. Three year old kindergarten In regard to kindergarten programs for 3-year-old children, these are not funded by the government and operate on a full user pays basis. In addition to the State funded 4 year old kindergarten program, there are a total of 1,071 3-year-old kindergarten places provided from stand-alone kindergarten services and independent schools in 2014. No accurate data on 3 year old kindergarten fees has been collected.
Neighbourhood houses/community centres	Ten high quality neighbourhood houses/community centres service the City of Whitehorse. These provide a range of community strengthening activities and support services for young people and families.
Education	The municipality is well resourced with a range of primary, secondary, and tertiary schools/colleges that are operated under government, independent or catholic education auspices. There are 38 primary schools in the City of Whitehorse.
Churches	Nearly 100 churches (religious institutions), covering most religious beliefs, exist in the City of Whitehorse.
Sport, recreation & leisure	There are more than 180 recreation, sport, and general leisure based clubs and societies spread across the municipality.
Libraries	The municipality is well serviced with four (4) library branches spread across the municipality.
Police stations	There are three (3) police stations operating in the City of Whitehorse, two of which are staffed 24 hours a day.

Secondary & tertiary services

Resourcing & inclusion	The City of Whitehorse is serviced by: • Inclusion Support Facilitators – to promote inclusion of children with additional needs into childcare services. • Inclusion Support Program – to provide assistance and support to help child care services to include all children, including those with additional needs, in the child care environment. • Pre-School Field Officers – to assist the inclusion of children with developmental concerns to access a funded year of Kindergarten through the provision of consultancy, support and advice to Kindergarten teachers and families.

	Whitehorse families also have access to a range of other resourcing and inclusion support services that are delivered across the region and state. These include support for sport and recreation environments that are inclusive of people with disabilities and supports for children with severe disabilities who attend a State funded kindergarten by providing funding to enable the employment of an additional assistant.
Development concerns	There are a variety of services and programs that aim to support children up to the age of 12 with developmental issues.
Early childhood intervention	A range of local, regional and state-wide early childhood intervention services are provided for children and families in the City of Whitehorse.
Specialist child and family services	A number of regional specialist child and family services are provided in the City of Whitehorse.
Audiology	Hearing testing, hearing screening and auditory processing services are available locally in the City of Whitehorse and across Greater Melbourne.
Education	A range of specialist education services are available to City of Whitehorse residents across the eastern metropolitan suburbs.
Aids and equipment	A range of regional services are available in the City of Whitehorse to provide support to children and families with a disability or special needs to access aids and equipment.
Respite care	A range of local and regional respite care services are available in the City of Whitehorse for families of children with a disability or special needs.
Maternity and post natal services	A large number of maternity and post natal services are available in the City of Whitehorse, including local, regional and state-wide services.
Behaviour and parenting	There are a variety of services and programs within Whitehorse aimed at supporting parents and caregivers with additional parenting support needs.
Family support and counselling	Family support and counselling services are provided by a range of agencies in the City of Whitehorse. These services include provision of information, counselling and direct support for families with particular needs.
Housing & accommodation	There are a variety of services and programs within Whitehorse aimed at meeting the accommodation needs of young people. These are predominantly provided by four (4) key service agencies.
Health services	There are a wide variety of health services and programs working with families in the Whitehorse municipality. This scope of this sector is very broad. Mental health services There are four (4) major agencies providing mental health services in Whitehorse. Drug and alcohol service There are three (3) major agencies providing drug and alcohol support services in the City of Whitehorse.

	General health services There are three (3) major agencies providing general health services in the City of Whitehorse. Sexual health and family planning services There are five (5) major agencies providing sexual health and family planning services in the City of Whitehorse.
Multicultural support services	There are a range of multicultural services based in Whitehorse aimed at meeting the needs of refugees and newly arrived migrants.
Disability support services	There are a range of disability services operating in the municipality, providing direct support services and programs and/or peak advocacy activities. There are four (4) major agencies providing disability services in Whitehorse. There is also support for sport and recreation environments that are inclusive of people with disabilities and provision of recreation-based respite weekends away for carers of people with a disability or special needs.
Legal services	Families in Whitehorse have access to free legal advice through the services provided by the Eastern Community Legal Centre. This is the only community legal centre in the Eastern region covering the municipalities of Boroondara, Manningham, Maroondah, Knox, Yarra Ranges and Whitehorse. Free legal advice is available for disadvantaged members of the community, particularly culturally and linguistic diverse (CALD) communities, young and elderly people and victims of family violence.
Specialist schools	There are four (4) specialist schools located in the City of Whitehorse, including: • Blackburn English Language School – catering to refugee and migrant students • Vermont South Special School - catering to primary aged students with a mild intellectual disability • Burwood East Special Development School - catering to students aged from 4 to 18 with a medium to high intellectual disability. • Aurora School - catering to students aged 3 to 18 who are deaf or deaf and blind and requiring early intervention, and/or early education.
General Support and Counselling Services	In addition to the above specific services, there a wide number of general support and counselling services and programs catering to the needs of families in the Whitehorse area.
Mandated services	A range of mandated services are provided from the DHS Box Hill offices, including protective services, juvenile justice and Child First.

SHAPING A NEW PLAN

Four key sources of information have been documented to inform the development of the Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-2018. These include:

- Assessment of government policy, funding and programs at federal, state and local levels.
- Summary of demographic information relating to families and children in the City of Whitehorse.
- Profile and mapping of universal, secondary and tertiary services available in the City of Whitehorse to support children and families.
- Outcomes from the community engagement process undertaken to capture community and stakeholder feedback in relation to improving outcomes for children and families in the City of Whitehorse.

Together, these sources of information have shaped the development and structure of the new plan.

Government policy

Despite differences in tier of government and politics of the day, government policy, funding and programs at federal, state and local levels are largely consistent in priorities for improving outcomes for children and families.

Government priorities typically focus on improving outcomes for children in the first 2-3 years of their life, given the research and evidence of how critical this period is in influencing long-term health and wellbeing, followed by a strong focus on quality education and care.

Some of the key priority areas consistently identified in government policy, funding and programs include:

- Strengthening the skills, capacity and confidence of parents and caregivers
    - Ensuring maternal health during pregnancy
    - Reducing risk factors that lead to low birth weight
    - Equipping parents and caregivers to provide safe, loving and engaged home environments
    - Maximising child health outcomes through breastfeeding and immunisation
    - Reducing negative factors in the home environment, such as drug and alcohol abuse, family violence and child abuse
    - Remaining socially connected and engaged with support services

- Providing stimulating environments that support learning and development of children

- Maximising early childhood growth, development and learning
  - Development of secure and trusting relationships with parents or carers
  - Early language and brain development
  - Physical wellbeing through nutrition and activity
  - Socialisation

- Development of skills required to successfully participate in learning environments

Improving early childhood service quality, accessibility, affordability and integration

- Increasing early childhood workforce qualifications
- Creating quality learning and care environments and standards
- Improving access to services, particularly by vulnerable families
- Providing early intervention and responsive services
- Increase service coordination and integration

Government policy, funding and programs support universal service provision for all children and families and supported targeted service provision for children and families with additional needs and high levels of vulnerability.

Government policy, funding and programs also focus on creating environments, communities and places that support and enable positive outcomes for children. These priorities include to ensure that communities are safe, accessible, welcoming, inclusive and provide opportunities for children to be active, stimulated and socialise.

Demographic information

The assessment of demographic information relating to families and children in the City of Whitehorse highlighted a few significant implications for the new Municipal Early Years Plan.

Key among these in the City of Whitehorse is the cultural and language diversity within the municipality and the opportunities and challenges this presents. Key priorities identified include the need to ensure that children and families of all backgrounds are welcome, included and can access support services they require.

Another key finding of the demographic assessment relates to the settlement pattern of families with children, which has largely shifted to the suburbs located in the eastern half of the municipality.

A key implication of this is accessibility of services, many of which are concentrated in the Box Hill precinct.

The relatively small growth in the number of children projected in the municipality will result in largely stable demand for universal services, while changing dynamics, conditions and family pressures may lead to a more significant increase in demand for secondary and tertiary services.

Service mapping

The service mapping exercise demonstrated that the City of Whitehorse, being centrally located in the eastern metropolitan region, is very well serviced by children and family services.

Universal services are well dispersed throughout the municipality. Secondary and tertiary services tend to be more concentrated in the Box Hill precinct, which is quite accessible via car and public transport.

No significant service gaps were identified through the mapping process.

Community consultation

The extensive community consultation process identified the many positive attributes of Whitehorse for families and children; key issues and challenges currently faced by children and families; a number of important service gaps; and a significant number of opportunities and priorities to improve outcomes for children and families in Whitehorse.

Key directions

Community consultation, research, analysis of legislation and policy directions have identified four key directions for the Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan to improve outcomes for children and their families in the municipality.

Key priorities for improving outcomes for children and their families appeared to consistently revolve around four key themes: children, their families, the services and supports they access and the broader community in which they live.

With these themes in mind, the following four key directions were identified:

- Healthy, active and thriving children

  The first of these focuses on children and ensuring that all children have the opportunity to grow, learn and develop into healthy, active and thriving children. This direction focuses on enhancing protective factors and reducing the risk factors in a child's life. It also responds to key priorities identified through the community consultation process in relation to physical activity and nutrition of children, supporting and encouraging play and participation in kindergarten and school.

- Secure, supported and engaged families

  The second of these focuses on strengthening the skills, capacity and confidence of parents and caregivers. This key direction recognises the critical importance of a safe, engaged and supportive family environment to the health and wellbeing of children. It responds to key priorities identified through the community consultation process in relation to the need to support vulnerable families and those with additional needs and increasing social inclusion of all families.

- Quality services for all children & families

  The third key direction focuses on the quality, accessibility, affordability and integration of early childhood services that support children and their families. This key direction recognises the importance of a high quality service system in shaping a child's life and long-term development outcomes. It responds to key priorities identified through the community consultation process in relation to improving knowledge about and use of existing services, improving service availability and affordability where gaps exist, and supporting children and families with a disability or special needs.

- Safe, welcoming and inclusive community for all children & families

  The fourth key direction focuses on improving the environment in which a child lives and relates to. This key direction seeks to ensure that the City of Whitehorse is a safe, welcoming and inclusive community for all children, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, language, gender, ability or socio economic status. This key direction responds to a clear priority conveyed through the community consultation process in relation to inclusiveness and a major priority of children being places and spaces they visit and utilise in the community, such as parks and playgrounds. The key direction also recognises the broader concept of it taking a village to raise a child.

Linkage of the Key Strategic Objectives of the Municipal Early Years Plan with the Municipal Public Health Plan and the Council Plan

Within the four proposed key directions a number of priority strategic directions have been identified, based on the analysis of background documents and community consultation feedback.

	Council Plan Strategic Direction	**MPHP** Objective
Healthy, active & thriving children		
Increasing children's physical activity and participation in sport and exercise	1	1.1, 1.4 & 1.5
Improving children's nutrition through encouraging healthy eating for all families and children	1 & 5	1.1, 1.2 & 5.2
Encouraging and supporting play for children of all ages	1 & 2	1.1, 1.4, 1.5 & 2.2
Enhancing children's personal health & wellbeing	1, 2 & 4	1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 & 4.3
Reducing the prevalence and impact of bullying	1 & 4	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 & 4.1
Promoting breastfeeding and immunisation	1 & 4	1.1, 1.2 & 4.3
Supporting childhood learning, growth and development, including participation in kindergarten and successful transitions to school	1, 2 & 5	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 2.3 & 5.3
Secure, supported and engaged families		
Strengthening the skills and capacity of all parents and caregivers to provide good parenting	1	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4 & 1.5
Providing targeted support for parents and caregivers, including vulnerable families, young mothers, fathers, culturally diverse parents and parents with a disability or special needs	1 & 4	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 & 4.1
Promoting and supporting social inclusion of all children and families in the community	1 & 4	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 & 4.1
Promoting whole of family wellbeing and families engaging in activities together	1 & 4	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5 & 4.1
Quality services for all children & families		
Improving knowledge about and use of existing services	1 & 2	1.2, 1.4, 1.5 & 2.3
Improving partnering, collaboration and integration across the early years service system	1 & 5	1.1, 1.2 & 5.3

Enhancing early years service workforce capacity	1, 4 & 5	1.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 & 5.3
Improving the flexibility and accessibility of early years services	1 & 4	1.2, 4.1, 4.2 & 4.3
Improving the affordability of early years services	1, 4 & 5	1.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 & 5.3
Increasing service provision where current gaps exist	1, 4 & 5	1.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 & 5.3
Meeting the service and support needs of children and families with a disability or special needs	1, 2, 3 & 5	1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 3.3, 4.1, 5.3
Safe, welcoming & inclusive community for all children and families		
Creating a community that is friendly and accessible for all children	1, 2, 3, 4 & 5	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 3.3, 4.1, 5.3
Improving engagement of children in relevant Council planning and decision-making processes	1 & 4	1.1, 1.3, 1.5, 4.1, 4.2 & 4.3
Providing open space environments that support healthy children and families and encourage children to be outdoors and active	1 & 2	1.1, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2 & 2.3
Providing a physical environment that encourages and supports a safe and connected community	1 & 2	1.1, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2 & 2.3
Promoting environmental sustainability	3	3.1, 3.2 & 3.3

These four key directions and key strategic priorities form the basis of the following strategic action plan.

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2014-2018

The Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-2018, *A City for all Children,* contains a range of key directions, objectives and actions aimed at improving the lives and wellbeing of children aged 0-12 and their families. This plan builds on the work undertaken and success achieved through the implementation of previous early years plans in the City of Whitehorse.

All key directions, objectives and actions have been identified based on detailed consideration of community consultation findings, service mapping, an analysis of demographics, and current early years policy at various levels of government.

Implementation of this strategic action plan will support Council's commitment to create a Child Friendly City, as recognised by UNICEF and assist all children to achieve the best start to life.

The strategic action plan of the City of Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-2018 is structured around the following framework comprising four key, interlinked pillars with a central focus on enhancing outcomes for children.

Safe, welcoming & inclusive community for all children and families
Healthy, active & thriving children
Secure, supported & engaged families
Quality services for all children and families

The City of Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan 2014-2018 utilises the term 'family' in its broadest sense, recognising and respecting the full diversity of relationship structures that wrap around and support children.

The plan will be given effect through the development of annual implementation plan to operationalise the key directions, objectives and strategic actions outlined in this plan and report to Council on its implementation every six months.

MEYP IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING & REVIEW

The City of Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan will be implemented over the four year period 2014-2018 by various departments across the Whitehorse City Council.

Council staff will develop an annual implementation plan to operationalise the key directions, objectives and strategic actions outlined in this plan and report to Council on its implementation every six months.

Implementation of the City of Whitehorse Municipal Early Years Plan will be monitored over time and progress reported to and guided by a multi-agency reference group.

The plan will be reviewed and renewed at the end of 2018.

Strategic Directions in the *Whitehorse Council Plan 2013 17* referenced to the Key Objectives of the Municipal Public Health Plan (MPHP) – *Health & Wellbeing*

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1 SUPPORT A HEALTHY, VIBRANT, INCLUSIVE AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2 MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE OUR BUILT ENVIRONMENT TO ENSURE A LIVEABLE AND SUSTAINABLE CITY	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3 PROTECT AND ENHANCE OUR OPEN SPACE AND NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4 STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND OPEN AND ACCESSIBLE GOVERNMENT	STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5 SUPPORT A HEALTHY LOCAL ECONOMY
BJECTIVE 1.1 o identify and respond to merging health priorities across e lifespan* **BJECTIVE 1.2** o work in partnership to upport access to culturally ppropriate health services, ncluding preventative and rotective health services* **BJECTIVE 1.3** o promote gender equity and qual and respectful elationships* **BJECTIVE 1.4** o provide opportunities for creased social connections hrough participation in arts and ulture, recreation, sporting and ther community activities* **BJECTIVE 1.5** o encourage social and cultural nvironments that value people all their diversity	**OBJECTIVE 2.1** To integrate health outcomes when considering land use planning and urban design projects **OBJECTIVE 2.2** To create built environments that make it easier for people to be physically active **OBJECTIVE 2.3** To create safe, inclusive and accessible environments for all* **OBJECTIVE 2.4** To advocate and plan for integrated transport connections to provide increased opportunities for active living and local employment*	**OBJECTIVE 3.1** To minimise the impacts of climate change on our natural environment and promote efficient use of resources* **OBJECTIVE 3.2** To develop a municipality which retains, enhances and increases open space and sustainable streetscapes* **OBJECTIVE 3.3** To minimise the impact of climate change on residents, particularly those most vulnerable	**OBJECTIVE 4.1** To strengthen and build partnerships to achieve a collaborative approach to health and wellbeing **OBJECTIVE 4.2** To use evidence-based practice to guide policy and decision making **OBJECTIVE 4.3** To enhance reporting and accountability of health and wellbeing outcomes to the community	**OBJECTIVE 5.1** To advocate for increased affordable housing* **OBJECTIVE 5.2** To improve access to affordable, nutritious, safe and culturally appropriate foods **OBJECTIVE 5.3** To support planning a healthy community and business mix, increasing opportunities to live, work and play in Whitehorse

*Objectives which are also in the Council Plan 2013-2017

Health and Wellbeing in Whitehorse 2013-2017 will be implemented with actions underneath each of the objectives to address the health and wellbeing priorities

CREATING SAFE ENVIRONMENTS | REDUCING HARM FROM ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS | INCREASING ACTIVE LIVING | SUPPORTING HEALTHY EATING | PROMOTING MENTAL WELLBEING

Strategic Action Plan – Whitehorse a city for all children

Healthy, active & thriving children	
Increasing children's physical activity and exercise	
1.1	Encourage and enhance opportunities for children of all ages and abilities to regularly participate in physical activity, sport and exercise.
1.2	Work in partnership with primary schools throughout Whitehorse to promote, encourage and support children to safely walk and ride bicycles to school.
1.3	Promote and support the regular use of Council parks, playgrounds and open spaces for both active and passive recreational purposes.
1.4	In partnership with sporting and recreation clubs, promote participation by children of all abilities in a diversity of local community sports and recreation activities.
Improving children's nutrition	
1.5	Promote and encourage healthy eating for all families and children.
1.6	Partner with primary schools and early childhood services throughout Whitehorse to encourage and promote healthy eating.
Encouraging and supporting play	
1.7	Promote the importance of play for children of all ages.
1.8	Support the growth and operation of playgroups, local toy libraries and other activities that facilitate play.
Enhancing children's personal health & wellbeing	
1.9	In partnership with key early years service providers and primary schools, develop a range of strategies to help reduce the prevalence and impact of bullying.
1.10	Continue to actively promote immunisation for all children and families in the municipality in order to reduce the prevalence of childhood infectious diseases.
1.11	Promote and support breastfeeding in order to improve long-term health outcomes for children.
Supporting childhood learning, growth and development	
1.12	Recognise and promote the importance of learning from birth and the attainment of early childhood basic skills to support future learning.
1.13	Promote 3 year old kindergarten and other pre-kindergarten programs such as playgroup to assist children to develop learning and socialisation skills.

Healthy, active & thriving children	
1.14	Facilitate an increased participation in 4 year old kindergarten, in particular for vulnerable families.
1.15	Support initiatives aimed at enhancing school readiness and successful transitions to school.

Secure, supported and engaged families	
Strengthening the skills and capacity of all parents and caregivers to provide good parenting	
2.1	Promote the importance of secure, safe, involved and caring family environments to the health and wellbeing of children.
2.2	Support families to provide the best environment, love, care and parenting possible to their children.
Providing targeted support for parents and caregivers	
2.3	Provide targeted education and support for vulnerable families.
2.4	Establish targeted playgroups and support groups for young mothers, fathers, culturally diverse parents and parents with a disability or special needs.
2.5	Advocate for the needs of vulnerable families.
Promoting and supporting social inclusion of all children and families in the community	
2.6	Increase social connectedness and reduce social isolation of families throughout the municipality.
2.7	Encourage participation in community festivals, events and activities.
2.8	Promote and support participation in volunteering programs.
2.9	Promote participation in playgroups by parents and caregivers as a means to develop social connections.
2.10	Work with schools to promote and facilitate increased participation by school students in community programs, events and activities.
2.11	Develop a program targeting socially isolated grandparents caring for young children to become more involved in community activities.
2.12	Explore opportunities to establish targeted groups aimed at increasing social connectivity of recently arrived migrants and CALD communities.
Promoting whole of family wellbeing	
2.13	Promote and encourage parents and caregivers to participate in activities as a whole family.
2.14	Support the provision of spaces, environments and activities specifically aimed at engaging the entire family.
2.15	Create and encourage family friendly events.
2.16	Promote the importance of grandparents, extended family and other trusted relationships in a child's life.

Quality services for all children & families	
Improving knowledge about and use of existing services	
3.1	Develop and implement new mechanisms, including online resources and social media, to better promote the availability of existing service supports for children, families and other service providers.
3.2	Enhance Council's corporate website and electronic communications to improve the provision of information about early years services available in Whitehorse.
3.3	Promote the location of Council's parks and playgrounds to families.
3.4	Use immunisation sessions to promote other family and children services.
3.5	Promote Council's early years services, programs and activities at community festivals and other Council events.
Improving partnering, collaboration and integration across the early years service system	
3.6	Facilitate early years service network and partnership groups to share information, promote increased partnering and enhance service collaboration.
3.7	Continue to explore opportunities to collocate other appropriate allied early childhood service professionals within Council's family centres.
3.8	Promote the co-location of kindergartens with primary schools where feasible.
3.9	Proactively strengthen the relationship and collaboration between early years service providers and primary schools.
Enhancing early years service workforce capacity	
3.10	In partnership with other service providers, develop a sector-wide approach to enhancing early years service workforce skills, education and capacity, including joint professional development exercises.
3.11	Provide skills for early childhood professionals to facilitate meaningful participation of children in Council's community engagement processes.
Improving the flexibility and accessibility of early years services	
3.12	Advocate for increased state and federal government funding for increased interpreter services to enable services to be effectively delivered to families with low English fluency.
3.13	Work in partnership with all childcare providers to assess the feasibility of improving the flexibility and accessibility of childcare through extended hours of

Secure, supported and engaged families	
	operation.
3.14	Work with community leaders and organisations to identify strategies to better engage with children and families of CALD background.
3.15	In partnership with specialist service providers and community representatives, continue to review the cultural responsiveness of early years services in Whitehorse.
3.16	Work with family day care educators to explore opportunities to extend hours of operation.
3.17	Work with family day care educators to facilitate greater access to family day care for children and families with a broad range of disabilities.
Improving the affordability of early years services	
3.18	Advocate to the Federal Government for increased funding to improve the affordability of all childcare services in Whitehorse.
3.19	Advocate for improved affordable health and dental care for low-income families and better promote available service supports.
Increasing service provision where current gaps exist	
3.20	Advocate to local school communities for an increase in the number of affordable school holiday programs delivered including programs that cater for children with disabilities.
3.21	Work with kindergarten committees to develop strategies for increasing the availability of kindergarten places for both 3 and 4 year old children.
3.22	In partnership with key service providers and schools, identify and advocate for increased mental health and other support services for children aged 9-12 years.
Meeting the service and support needs of children and families with a disability or special needs	
3.23	Support and advocate for children with a disability or special needs to participate in a full range of social, educational, health, sporting and recreational activities and to access other services they require.
3.24	Advocate for the establishment of a school holiday programs that meet the needs of children with a disability or special needs.
3.25	Advocate for increased state and federal government funding for the provision of services and supports for children with a disability or special needs and their families, including respite services.

Safe, welcoming & inclusive community for all children and families	
Creating a community that is friendly and accessible for all children	
4.1	Continue to enhance the City of Whitehorse as a child friendly city in a way that is consistent with the aims and objectives of the UNICEF Child Friendly City program.
4.2	Provide children of all ages the opportunity to contribute and have their voices heard and respected in relevant Council planning and decision-making processes.
Providing open space environments that support healthy children and families	
4.3	Identify opportunities to expand and enhance Council's portfolio of parks, gardens, playgrounds and open spaces.
4.4	Involve children in the development and upgrade of parks and playgrounds.
4.5	Identify opportunities to extend and enhance connectivity of Council's network of walking paths and off-road cycling tracks.
4.6	Create modern playgrounds with an array of play equipment that encourages young children to be outdoors and active.
4.7	Design play spaces that are accessible and meet the need of a wide range of children's interests, including sensory play spaces.
4.8	Explore the feasibility of creating enclosed or partially enclosed spaces in parks and playgrounds to create safe play zones.
Providing a physical environment that encourages and supports a safe and connected community	
4.9	Review road and path infrastructure around schools and encourage schools to participate in the wide range of programs offered by Council that promote safe, active and sustainable transport.
4.10	Advocate for ongoing improvements to the City of Whitehorse public transport network, particularly cross-city routes and areas not well serviced by existing train, tram and bus network.
4.11	Promote opportunities for children and families to utilise public spaces.
Promote environmental sustainability	
4.12	Deliver environmental sustainability programs and initiatives that engage families and children.

APPENDIX A: CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Child Friendly Cities Initiative provides a framework for recognition of local governments for their ongoing efforts towards improvements and demonstrated impacts achieved in the everyday lives of its young citizens.

Child Friendly Cities reflects the fullest implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the local level - where it has the greatest direct impact on children's lives.

A Child Friendly City is actively engaged in fulfilling the right of every young citizen to:

- Influence decisions about their city or community
- Express their opinion about the community they want
- Participate in family, community and social life
- Be an equal citizen of their city
- Have access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender, disability or special needs
- Actively supports the vulnerable members of their community to engage with civil society and improve their circumstance
- Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse
- Walk safely in the streets on their own
- Meet friends and play
- Have green spaces for plants and animals
- Live in an unpolluted environment
- Participate in cultural and social events
- Learn about their human rights in schools and community spaces.

Local councils have a direct ability to impact the lives of children in their community. Most importantly, councils can actively foster community awareness and culture which recognises children and young people as equal citizens with rights, voice and an important contribution.

UNICEF Australia is currently piloting Child Friendly Cities Initiative in Australia to develop a best practice model.

Further information about the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities Initiative can be found at www.unicef.org.au